

Message Text

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12

ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

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R 090501Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8031

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 1446

EXDIS

DEPT PASS CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT NZ

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER'S HEALTH AND PROSPECT OF WEAKER GNZ

REF: WELLINGTON 1422

BEGIN SUMMARY: EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESENT GNZ CLOSELY
LINKED TO PM'S HEALTH. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER DINNER AT MY RESIDENCE MAY 8 DCM ASKED DEPUTY
LEADER OPPOSITION MULDOON, AN ASTUTE POLITICIAN,
WHETHER HE THOUGH NZ WOULD HAVE A VIABLE GOVERNMENT
STRONG ENOUGH TO COPE WITH CURRENT PROBLEMS BY 1976
(ELECTIONS WILL BE NOVEMBER 1975).

2. IN REPLY, MULDOON MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. "THERE ARE NO SECRETS IN THE PARLIAMENT."

MP'S BELIEVED PM HAD SUFFERED CORONARY. HE CITED
POINTS IN REFTEL AND ADDED: A) KIRK'S ACTIVE MIND
DOESNT LET HIM RELAX: B) IT IS BELIEVED KIRK HAS
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE; C) MP PETER GORDON, WHO SITS
OPPOSITE KIRK IN PARLIAMENT AND SO HAS OBSERVED HIM
FOR MANY YEARS, HAS TWO BROTHERS WHO ARE WELL-KNOWN
MD'S. HE HAS CITED TO THEM PM'S OVERWEIGHT, AND
HIS OBSERVATION THAT UNDER PRESSURE OF DEBATE PM
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BECOMES VERY EXCITED. KNOWING ALL ABOVE, PLUS EVIDENCE

REFTEL, GORDON'S MD BROTHERS BELIEVE HE IS CORONARY PRONE, HAS PROBABLY SUFFERED FROM CORONARY, AND RECUPERATIVE PERIOD WILL BE DRAWN OUT IF HE SURVIVES.

B. KIRK "IS" THE LABOUR PARTY. IF HE WERE NOTICEABLY WEAKER, GNZ WOULD BE ALSO.

C. MULDOON AGREED NATIONAL PARTY HAD LOST SOME OF ITS BEST YOUNG MEN IN 1972 ELECTION. WHILE HE HAD GREAT HOPES THAT SID GOING, A YOUNG ALL BLACK (NZ CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM) RUGBY STAR WHO IS HALF MAORI AND A POPULAR HERO THROUGHOUT NZ, WOULD RUN FOR WHANGEREI SEAT IN 1975 AND THEREBY SWING MANY SMALL TOWN SEATS TO NATIONAL (SMALL TOWN RUGBY FANS STRONGLY OBJECT TO KIRK'S REFUSAL TO LET ALL BLACKS PLAY SOUTH AFRICAN SPRING BOKS--TO THEM THIS IS A NATIONAL ISSUE), HE DID NOT PREDICT THE OUTCOME OF THE 1975 ELECTION.

3. COMMENTS:

A. PROBABLY GNZ, WHICH NOW BESET WITH SERIOUS PROBLEMS--INFLATION, ENERGY PROBLEM, MANPOWER SHORTAGE IN ALL ECONOMIC SECTORS--WILL HENCEFORTH BE WEAKER SINCE ITS LEADER WILL BE WEAKER.

B. WHILE REPORTING OFFICER IS WELL AWARE THAT 6 MONTHS IS A LONG TIME IN POLITICS, DEVELOPMENTS IN PAST FEW WEEKS INDICATE 1975 ELECTIONS COULD BE CLOSER THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT. IF LABOUR WINS, IT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT FURTHER WEAKENED BY LOSS OF SEATS. IF NATIONAL WINS, IT WILL PROBABLY BE BY NARROW MAJORITY AND PARTY WILL FACE PROBLEM OF DIVIDED LEADERSHIP BETWEEN MARSHALL AND MULDOON. BOTH MEN ARE USEFUL TO PARTY: MARSHALL BECAUSE HE IS AN UNDER-SPOKEN GENTLEMAN, THE TYPE RESPECTED BY CONSERVATIVE, WEALTHY NATIONAL PARTY VOTERS; MULDOON FOR THE OPPOSITE REASON THAT HE IS A TOUGH, KNOWLEDGEABLE AND VERY EFFECTIVE POLITICAL IN-FIGHTER AND ALSO BECAUSE HE IS VERY GOOD ON NZ BUDGET AND FISCAL MATTERS AND WORLD MONETARY MATTERS. IF EITHER STEPS ASIDE COMPLETELY, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND BOTH SEEM DETERMINED NOT TO, NATIONAL WOULD BE WEAKENED. RESULT: NATIONAL WILL EITHER CONTINUE TO SUFFER PROBLEM OF DIVIDED LEADERSHIP (ALTHOUGH MARSHALL IS TITULAR LEADER) OR LOSE ONE OF ITS TWO BEST LEADERS.

4. CONCLUSIONS:

A. GNZ WILL PROBABLY BE WEAKER AND LESS ABLE COPE WITH PROBLEMS OF INFLATION (ESPECIALLY ALMOST

UNCONTROLLABLE LABOR WAGE DEMANDS), WHICH WILL MAKE
NEW ZEALAND A LESS EFFECTIVE US ALLY. THIS WEAKNESS
MAY BE INCREASED BY 1975 ELECTIONS.

B. GNZ WILL PROBABLY NOT CHANGE ITS INTER-
NATIONAL POLICY WHICH IS USEFUL TO US UNLESS A WEAKENED
KIRK DECIDES OR IS FORCED TO SEEK STRENGTH FROM THE
LEFT. EMBASSY BELIEVES THIS UNLIKELY AS IT WOULD BE
CONTRARY TO KIRK'S BELIEFS AND HE KNOWS IT WOULD OPEN
A PANDORA'S BOX OF IMPRACTICAL AND HARMFUL POLICIES
WHICH WOULD BE BAD FOR HIM AND FOR NEW ZEALAND.
SELDEN

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED CINCPAC.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRIME MINISTER, MEDICAL CARE, POLITICAL STABILITY, NATIONAL ELECTIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 MAY 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GarlanWA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974WELLIN01446
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740112-0982
From: WELLINGTON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740559/aaaacaws.tel
Line Count: 128
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: WELLINGTON 1422
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GarlanWA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUL 2002 by elyme>; APPROVED <10 FEB 2003 by GarlanWA>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRIME MINISTER'S HEALTH AND PROSPECT OF WEAKER GNZ
TAGS: PINT, NZ, (KIRK, NORMAN E)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005